



Department of Justice

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
THURSDAY, JUNE 29, 2006
WWW.USDOJ.GOV

CRM
(202) 514-2007
TDD (202) 514-1888

Colombian National Convicted On Cocaine Charges

Former Member of Colombian Senate Faces Lengthy Prison Sentence

WASHINGTON—Samuel Santander Lopesierra, a former member of the Colombian Senate, was convicted for conspiring to unlawfully import cocaine into the United States, the Justice Department announced today. The jury found that Lopesierra and his group were responsible for smuggling shipments of hundreds of kilograms of cocaine into the United States, and for laundering the proceeds so they could be repatriated through Puerto Rico, New York, and Miami back to Colombia.

Lopesierra is facing a mandatory minimum sentence of 10 years and fines of up to \$4 million. The jury verdict was returned on June 27, 2006, and came after a seven-week long trial before the Honorable Richard J. Leon, United States District Court for the District of Columbia. Sentencing has been scheduled for October 27, 2006.

The jury was unable to reach a verdict as to Lopesierra's co-defendant, Dolcey Padilla Padilla, also a Colombian national, and Judge Leon declared a mistrial in this defendant's case today.

Lopesierra is a former member of the Colombian Senate — representing the Department of La Guajira from 1993 to 1996 — and a partner in a family business that imported cigarettes and whiskey into Colombia. The defendants were indicted in September 2002, along with 12 other Colombian nationals, following a two-year investigation conducted by the Colombian National Police with the assistance of the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration. That investigation, titled "Operation Conquista," resulted in the seizure of more than 650 kilograms of cocaine and more than \$1.5 million in United States currency and disrupted one of the largest drug trafficking groups operating along Colombia's north coast.

"The conviction of Lopesierra highlights the extensive and ongoing cooperation between the United States and Colombia in cutting off the flow of illegal drugs," said Assistant Attorney General Alice S. Fisher for the Criminal Division. "Our nations will continue to work together, transcending borders to bring to justice those who target Americans with illegal drugs."

The case was prosecuted by trial attorneys Robert Feitel, Michael DiLorenzo, Carmen Colón and paralegal Laura Wexler of the Criminal Division's Narcotic and Dangerous Drug Section (NDDS), and comes less than a year after the prosecution and conviction of William Martinez, former congressman in El Salvador, by NDDS trial attorneys. These convictions are part of the Department's ongoing initiative to identify, investigate, indict, and extradite for trial those international drug traffickers who unlawfully import illegal controlled substances into the United States.

###